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THE RHYTHM OF THE *AENEID*

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It is almost a commonplace among classical scholars that the outward form of Latin poetry is as important as the content. We admit that the artistic effect of the poem depends quite as much on the form as on the thought or feeling; yet how little attention is directed to this side of Latin verse. This disregard of the form, as compared with the thought, is a reaction from the false classicism of the eighteenth century, and is also the outgrowth of the practical spirit of American life which would grasp the substance and reject the show. But can we afford to throw away the half of the merit of Latin poetry? The thought in Horace is not as fresh for us today as it was even for his contemporaries. If he is to hold his place in literature, this must be largely due to an appreciation of the setting of the thought. And what is true of Horace is true of the other great poets of Rome.

Our traditional method of scanning has been little more than a mechanical division of the line into feet, while there was an entire disregard of the natural word-accent and even of sense-pauses. In view of such a theory well might Mr. J. B. Mayor say: "No doubt the scanning of Virgil is an easy thing and the scanning of Shelley and Milton a hard thing." While our theory has made it easy to scan Virgil, it has made it difficult to appreciate the wonderful melody of his verse.

That which is a distinguishing characteristic of the rhythm of Virgil is variety. This quality is as essential to the harmony of music and poetry as is regularity and unity. This variation from the norm of the verse is sometimes called poetic license. Many treatises have been written on the subject, but the treatise that is most to my liking occurs in a certain French work on prosody, and is in a chapter entitled "Des licences poétiques." The full text of this chapter is as follows: "Il n'y en a pas." These so-called

poetic licenses are the very breath of life of a great poem. They give it its individuality and raise the verse of a Virgil above the "correct" verse of a Valerius Flaccus, or even of an Ovid.

To appreciate the rhythm of Virgil in all its varied form, it is necessary to have in mind the normal rhythm of the Latin hexameter. This can be seen most clearly in those poets who conform closely to rule. For this purpose we may examine the verse of Ovid who for elegance and finish of workmanship is unsurpassed. Ovid, however, shows to a considerable extent the influence of Virgil, and he is not averse to the introduction of the Greek rhythm. The most intensely Roman in spirit and form is Lucan.

My subject is so broad that I shall be able to state only a few facts—dry and uninteresting I fear they will appear in themselves—but I hope that the reader's application of them may give new interest and meaning to one of the world's great masterpieces.

In the following remarks I shall take for granted that the hexameter involves an appreciable stress on the arsis, or strong part of the foot, and that the accent, such as would exist in prose, is an element of the verse-structure and affects the rhythm.

If we examine the verse of Ovid or Lucan, we find that the relation of the word-accent to the verse-ictus conforms to very definite laws, and that the laws are different in the different parts of the verse. In the second and third feet we have contrast of accent and ictus; in the fifth and sixth, coincidence of accent and ictus. The first and fourth feet, which are the connecting links between these contrasted rhythms, allow either contrast or coincidence. The first foot is almost as much a connecting link as the fourth. We are not to consider hexameter verse as made up simply of lines, but of groups of lines forming units which again are united into larger units. To make the contrast clear between the second and third feet and the other feet of the line, it is only necessary to remember that a single word cannot form either the second or third, but may form any other foot. This rule applies without exception in Ovid and Lucan. Virgil however in a few instances admits a dactylic word or ending, in the second foot.

The contrast of accent and ictus in the second and third feet involves the principle that the word-accent on the thesis shall be

stronger than that on the arsis. In the application of this principle we must take into account secondary accents at the beginning of words, as well as the primary accents. These secondary accents are in evidence in the language from the earliest to the latest times.

When the thesis has only a secondary accent, the arsis of the foot is usually the final syllable of a word of two or more syllables, and is thus without accent. When two monosyllables form the foot, the accent of the first is less prominent than that of the second, as in

| *et ius* | *est*.

The effect of these general laws of accent is to give to the first part of the line an even, sustained flow, while the close has a more pronounced cadence. We may often observe a similar tendency in English verse, as in:

Thy extreme hope, the loveliest and the last.

In the long hexameter line there is ample opportunity for variation of rhythm. We may compare the contract of cadence in the first and last part of the following quotation with that of an hexameter line:

When you do dance, I wish you
A wave o' the sea.

When, owing to elision, the word-accent falls on the arsis, the thesis has a primary word-accent, and the word to which it belongs is emphatic and is usually a noun, as in *revo|cate ani|mos*, or *exe|gere en|ses*. Lucan admits no exceptions to this rule, and Ovid but few. Virgil's method is in general the same, but exceptions are not infrequent. In lines such as:

Monstrum horrendum informe ingens, cui lumen ademptum;
—iii. 658.

Huc illuc vinclorum immensa volumina versat,
—v. 408.

the unusual coincidence of accent and ictus gives a special weight to the rhythm and re-enforces the thought.

When we compare the poet's method of dealing with dactylic and spondaic feet, we find that the rules are much more strict for spondaic feet than for dactylic. We have already noted that Virgil sometimes forms the second foot with a dactylic word or ending, but never with a spondaic word or ending. A spondaic word is used

with special restrictions in the first foot. It is an unemphatic word, like a conjunction, and would not have a prominent accent; or it is a word closely connected in thought with the following word, so that it would appear not so much as an individual word, but rather as a part of a word-group; or it is a word of special emphasis and used for rhetorical effect.

The spondaic word in the fourth foot is subject to even greater restrictions. In Ovid it is preceded by a monosyllable which is long in quantity, is subordinate in thought, and is accordingly without a prominent sentence-accent, and it is closely related in thought to the spondaic word. The monosyllable is usually preceded by a sense-pause, which is more or less marked. The monosyllable accordingly forms a sort of anacrusis, introducing the new clause. In a few rare instances, with a view to rhetorical effect, Ovid uses in place of the unaccented monosyllable an emphatic monosyllable. Virgil sometimes admits a pyrrhic word before the spondee. He is, however, careful to have the pyrrhic preceded by a sense-pause. The impressive effect of this rhythm is illustrated in the passage describing the death of Priam:

Regnatorem Asiae. iacet ingens litore truncus
Avolsumque umeris caput et sine nomine corpus.

—ii. 557.

We may notice in passing two other departures from the norm of the verse. The arsis of the second foot has the word-accent, and the second line is divided into two equal parts. I am aware that many of our "authorities" would favor placing the caesura after *umeris* or *et*, but if the verse is written to convey the thought it seems only fair to demand that it should be so read as to express the thought. But this principle will not justify us in dismembering the clauses. Such realism is not favored even in Roman art.

It has already been implied that word-groups, as well as words, must be taken into consideration in our reading of Latin. If we disregard this fundamental principle of language, our reading of Virgil will be on a par with the reading of the beginner in English who appears to be reading a list of words and not sentences expressing thought. In general the accent of word-groups, or stress-groups as they are sometimes called, is more variable than the accent of

individual words. The former depends largely on the desired emphasis, the latter on tradition. In the sentence, "Give me the book," we may accent only the first word or we may accent "give" and "book." In Latin the accent of word-groups does not conform to the principle which determines the accent in English. In our own language it depends on emphasis; in Latin it conforms in the main to the law of accent which governs individual words. The accent of *pro me* is on the first word, but in the English "for me" it is on the second. In *inter se* the accent is on the final syllable of *inter*. Accordingly the first two syllables of the word-group *inter se* may form the second foot, but the last two cannot be so used. In the latter case the effect would be to have a spondaic ending, which is not allowed in that part of the verse.

In word-groups monosyllables and dissyllables are the only words the accent of which recedes upon the preceding word. In order that two words may form a word-group it is necessary that they should be connected in thought. When two words are frequently used together the sentence-accent may entirely replace the individual word-accent. In some cases it is difficult to say whether such a combination should be classed as a compound word or as a word-group, as *si quis, huius modi*. In either case they are pronounced with one main accent, which is determined by the regular law of word-accent. Words which do not have a prominent accent in the sentence, such as sentence-enclitics, most readily unite with another word under one sentence-accent. Recession of accent is also favored by having a monosyllable as the first element of the word-group.

Let us now see whether the structure of the verse recognizes this recession of accent in the case of monosyllables. A very few figures will be sufficient to answer the question in the affirmative. Of Ovid's hexameters 155 end in a monosyllable. Of these 144 are preceded by another monosyllable. These monosyllables are as a rule closely connected in thought, and the second is in nearly every case a sentence-enclitic; in 61 lines it is the enclitic *est*. When, on the other hand, the second or third foot is formed by two monosyllables they are not so connected in thought as to form a word-group. In most cases the sense-pause between the two monosyllables is so marked that it is indicated in our texts by punctuation.

In the first four books of the *Metamorphoses*, for example, in the majority of cases a monosyllabic form of *esse* is the arsis, and the thesis is a monosyllable which belongs to a new clause.

Such a line as the following is very unusual, even in Virgil:

Demoror, ex quo me divom pater atque hominum rex.

—ii. 648.

The emphatic noun at the end of the line is exceptional, but not more so than the word-group *ex quo*, which forms the second foot. *Demoror* is made emphatic by the sense-pause, which comes after it at the close of the first foot. The force and effect of such a line cannot be appreciated when taken out of the context.

As the fourth foot allows the accent to fall either on the arsis or thesis, greater freedom is allowed in the use of the monosyllables. If the foot is formed by two monosyllables which are so united in thought that they may form a word-group, the foot is subject to the same restrictions which apply in the case of the spondaic word in this situation. Usually the monosyllables forming the fourth foot are subordinate words. We find in Ovid's verse that when one of these monosyllables is more emphatic it is the first. The accent will accordingly fall on the arsis and the rhythm of the foot will correspond to that of the fifth and sixth feet. Virgil's method in the *Eclogues* and *Georgics* corresponds to that of Ovid, but in the *Aeneid* we may note a marked change. Here the first of the two monosyllables is often a sentence-enclitic united by elision to the preceding word, and the second monosyllable is emphatic. The marked difference in the rhythm which results from this change of accent in the fourth foot is readily felt. Compare

Saepe malum hoc nobis, si mens non laeva fuisses,

—*Ecl.*, i. 16.

and

Obstupui steteruntque comae et vox faucibus haesit.

—*Aen.*, iii. 48.

An examination of the use of pyrrhic words strengthens the conclusions which we derived from our consideration of monosyllables. When a pyrrhic word is used in the thesis of the fifth foot it is regularly preceded by a monosyllable. The two are regularly related in thought, and the pyrrhic is apt to be a word which would have

a light sentence-accent. Some poets admit only such pyrrhic words as would naturally form a word-group with the accent on the first syllable, as *ác simul*.

The rules for the pyrrhic in the second and third feet are the opposite. In Ovid and Lucan the pyrrhic is rarely preceded by a monosyllable, never by one with which it can form a word-group. Even when preceded by polysyllabic words it is regularly separated by a sense-pause.

Virgil's method in the use of pyrrhic words in this part of the verse is interesting. In the *Eclogues* his usage corresponds to that of the stricter poets. In the *Georgics* he is somewhat freer, while in the *Aeneid* his method has entirely changed. Here the pause comes as frequently after the pyrrhic as before it. When, however, Virgil thus departs from the norm of the verse, he regularly introduces a strong sense-pause after the pyrrhic, so that the change of rhythm may be clear to the reader. The following lines illustrate the difference between these methods:

Exciderant ani|mo; manet | alta mente repostum;
—i. 26.

Sarpe|don, ubi | tot Simois correpta sub undis;
—i. 100.

In pup|pim ferit | ; excutitur pronusque magister
Volvitur | in caput | ; ast aliam ter fluctus ibidem.
—i. 115 f.

The cadence of the first two lines seems especially adapted to the expression of the gentler emotions, while that of the last two lines is more forceful and abrupt.

I should gladly omit the consideration of the iambic word. The subject is not an easy one to dispose of in a paragraph. I note a few facts and ask you to draw your own conclusions. In Lucan there are upwards of 2,000 examples of a trochaic word, or ending, in the second and third feet, and in every case it is followed by an iambic word. In nearly all cases these two words are closely related in thought, and in no case are they separated by a strong sense-pause. The union is made more marked by a sense-pause which regularly follows the iambic word. The iambic word is also very frequently a weak word such as a sentence-enclitic. The same general rules prevail in Virgil. I have noted 45 exceptions, but

these occur under special conditions, often in connection with Greek words and the feminine caesura, and are Greek in rhythm rather than Latin.

What is the explanation of these striking facts, or in other words what is the rhythm of the following lines?

Sergestus capit | ante lo | cum scopuloque propinquat,
Nec tota tamen | ille pri | or praeunte carina.

—v. 185 f.

It is generally agreed that the accent of *ante locum* is on the ultima of *ante*. Is not the accent of the corresponding foot in the second line apparently the same? If we assume the recession of accent of iambic words, the rhythm of the verse is uniform and we have the chief word-accent on the thesis of the second and third feet. On the other hand it is to be noted that the iambic word is often an emphatic word which under ordinary conditions would retain its accent. Shall we recognize the general rhythm of the verse as sufficiently strong to counterbalance the natural prominence of the word? This supposition does not involve a principle which is contrary to the laws of Latin accentuation; it merely emphasizes certain tendencies of the language, just as the rhythm of English poetry brings out the latent possibilities of the language but does not go contrary to its laws, as when it accents the final syllable of "pitiful" or treats "doomed" as a dissyllable.

Another important element in the rhythm of Latin poetry is the elision. Few poets have used it so freely as Virgil; none have used it with such artistic effect to heighten the rhythm and to give weight and impressiveness to the thought. The effect of the elision can be gained only when both vowels are sounded. Elision denotes not the dropping of a vowel, but the union of a final vowel with the initial vowel of the following word in such a way as to give the value of a verse-syllable.

Where a sense-pause occurs between vowels forming elision the usual custom has been to disregard the pause in reading. This method does violence to the thought, and is opposed to our methods of reading modern poetry. The structure of Latin verse shows also that the sense-pause was observed in reading. When the syllables forming the elision are closely related in thought the second of

the two forming the elision may receive a strong accent, as in *ante ora, tumida aequora*. In the first book of the *Aeneid* alone there are 54 such cases.

When a sense-pause intervenes between the syllables forming the elision, the second of the two syllables in elision does not receive a marked accent. The second element of the elision is a word which does not receive an accent on the first syllable, as *Italiam*, or it is a sentence-enclitic, as *et, atque, aut, ut, in*. These words would not have a sentence-accent in Latin any more than the corresponding words in English. The only exception in the first book is:

Laetitiaque metuque: avida coniungere dextas.

—514.

The rhythm of this line is as a whole Greek rather than Latin. The accented syllable is short, and its accent would not be so prominent as in the case of the long syllable. Most of the exceptions to the rule occur in connection with short syllables.

This book may be taken as typical of the usage of Virgil in respect to these two types of elision. Viewing Latin poetry as a whole we may say that when the words forming the elision are closely united in thought, the second element of the elision very frequently has a strong accent, but that when the elements of the elision are separated by a sense-pause, it does not receive such accent. There is almost no exception to the rule that in epic poetry the second element in pause-elision is not an accented syllable.

We may illustrate the method of reading these lines with pause-elision by reference to Milton. The great English epic poet is the best commentator on Virgil. While Tennyson so much resembles the Roman poet, not only in spirit and temper but also in the essential characteristics of his diction, it is to Milton that we must go to find the same grand cadence. We may compare

Bella gero. et quisquam numen Iunonis adorat

—i. 48.

with

Strange horror seize thee, and pangs unfelt before.

—*P. L.*, ii. 703.

The reason for the unaccented syllable as the second element of the elision is readily appreciated. The first syllable blends with the

pause, and the second rises from it and completes the verse-syllable. The verse-syllable thus formed by elision may be compared with a note with falling followed by rising tone, or with a syllable pronounced with falling followed by rising inflection. The pause does not destroy the unity of the syllable any more than other pauses destroy the unity of the foot in which they occur.

One of the most exceptional cases of elision occurs in the following:

Excisum Euboicae latus ingens rupis in antrum,
Quo lati ducunt aditus centum, ostia centum.

—vi. 42.

This is the beginning of the description of the cave of the Sibyl, and to prepare our minds for its mysteries the subject is introduced with an unusual rhythm. In the first line we have the fourth foot formed by a spondaic word preceded by a pyrrhic. The latter is not, as usual, preceded by a sense-pause; in fact there is no natural break in the whole line. The latter part of the second line is thrown into rhetorical form and this, in connection with the main theme, justifies the accented syllable as the second element of the pause-elision.

In conclusion I will give one more illustration of Virgil's method of imparting variety to the cadence of the hexameter:

Sic omnis amor unus habet decernere ferro.
Diripuerunt aras (it toto turbida caelo
Tempestas telorum ac ferreus ingruit imber).

—xii. 282 ff.

In the second and third lines we have the elision in the thesis which throws the word-accent on the arsis. In the second line the spondaic word in the fourth foot is preceded by an emphatic word. These two lines well illustrate Virgil's method of uniting two lines connected in thought into a couplet which is characterized by a general similarity of rhythm with minor variations.

We may note too how the rhythm and melody of the verse are colored by the vowel and consonant combinations. In the first line we have the contrasted vowel sounds *o* and *a*, *u* and *a*, at the beginning of the words, and the third line ends with words beginning with the similar sounds *in* and *im*. In contrast with the assonance at the beginning and end, the consonant prevails in the intervening part. At first we have the prevalence of the *r*-sound. This sound

is especially prominent in Virgil in passages which describe violence and ruin. In the rapid succession of the sharp *t*-sounds we hear the very clatter of the falling shafts.

The rhythm of the Latin hexameter cannot be appreciated without reference to the accent of the word-group; and this accent is an essential element of the verse. The facts which I have pointed out in regard to the verse are of importance, even if my interpretation of them is not accepted in all cases. In the words of Horace:

siquid novisti rectius istis,
Candibus inerti: si nil, his utere mecum.

For those who desire to pursue the subject further I would refer to the following: on ictus a suggestive article in the *American Journal of Philology*, Vol. XIX, pp. 361 ff.; Vol. XX, pp. 198 ff., 412 ff., on sentence-enclitics, Lindsay, *Latin Language*, pp. 165 ff.; on certain word-groups, *American Journal of Philology*, Vol. XXV, pp. 147 ff., and *Transactions American Philological Association*, Vol. XXXIV, pp. 60 ff.; on the relation of accent and ictus in the fifth and sixth feet of hexameter, *Ibid.*, Vol. XXXIV, pp. 26 ff., Vol. XXXV, pp. 10 ff.; on the spondee in the first foot, *Wiener Studien*, Vol. XIX, pp. 1 ff. My conclusions on other subjects discussed in the paper are based on material which I have collected in the course of my own studies. I have discussed pause-elision in *Transactions of American Philological Association*, Vol. XXXVI, pp. 82-102, and certain points to which I have here referred I hope to take up more in detail in *Classical Philology*, beginning with the January number.